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## **Demolition begins on former southwestern Illinois copper smelter now on Superfund list**

By Associated Press

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HARTFORD, Ill. (AP) — The long-awaited demolition of a former copper smelter that's been a southwestern Illinois eyesore is under way, though the state's environmental agency says toxic slag on the federal Superfund property isn't expected to be cleared out for years.

Crews supervised by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency this week began knocking down buildings on the 230-acre Chemetco site in Madison County near the village of Hartford, having already removed asbestos-containing materials, slag and sludge from the structures. The demolition is expected to be done by the end of November.

The site was a secondary copper smelter from 1969 to 2001 before operators filed for Chapter 7 bankruptcy protection while the company was in the midst of a court-imposed cleanup of the tainted property. The EPA ordered the site sealed and last year added the property to its Superfund National Priorities List.

More than 500,000 cubic yards of processing sludge and other hazardous materials were stored there. Elevated levels of the heavy metals copper, lead and cadmium have been found in sediments in onsite wetlands and a nearby lake.

Those wastes may take five years to remove, Illinois EPA spokeswoman Maggie Carson said. The U.S. EPA is trying to pinpoint parties that could be legally responsible under federal law for some of the cleanup costs the state environmental agency believes could amount to tens of millions of dollars, with the Superfund covering what's not recouped from others.

In 2000, the company was found guilty of using a secret pipeline to dump hazardous waste into a tributary of the Mississippi River for a decade before regulators found it in the mid-1990s. The status of the \$3.8 million in fines against the company for conspiracy and violating the federal Clean Water Act was not immediately clear Wednesday.

Several Chemetco workers were convicted of conspiracy in the case, sentenced to home detention and fined. Denis Feron, the company's 83-year-old former president who prosecutors say ordered the secret pipeline, remains a fugitive and has been believed to be living in his native Belgium.

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Late last year, U.S. officials agreed to defer prosecution of Feron in return for his acceptance of responsibility for his wrongdoing and paying \$500,000 for use in the restoration of Long Lake and surrounding wetlands.

"This was a sordid event in our history," said state Sen. William Haine, an Alton Democrat and Madison County's former top prosecutor. "It was a corrupt and irresponsible act to put this plant here in the first place.

"Someone should have went to jail for what happened here. Instead, the taxpayers are picking up the bill."

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